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SUBJECT: FRENCH CONFIRM BROAD SUPPORT FOR U.S. GOALS ON
U.S.-EU IRAQ CONFERENCE TO S/I JONES

REF: PARIS 2793

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: Senior French MFA and Presidency officials confirmed broad support for U.S. goals for the planned U.S.-EU conference on Iraq, during April 25 discussions with Senior Coordinator on Iraq Ambassador Richard Jones. French officials echoed U.S. views on the need for inclusiveness in Iraq's political process and the need to respect the calendar towards election of a permanent government by year-end. The French raised familiar concerns on delays in ITG formation and the threats of Kurdish separatism and sectarianism to Iraqi unity, and appeared reassured by Ambassador Jones' points on these issues. MFA officials, in passing, described the Iraqi government presence in Green Zone as problematic and hinted that an MNF withdrawal date could be helpful, but were careful not to press these points. There was general agreement on the need for an Iraqi lead and prominent UN role on donor coordination, with the French suggesting creation of a new donor coordination mechanism and "lead nation" roles in assisting specific sectors of Iraqi institutions. On the international conference, the most significant difference between the U.S. and French approach was the GoF preference for limiting invitees to the P-5, EU, G-8, UN and Iraq's neighbors -- a smaller grouping than that envisioned by the U.S. As reported reftel, MFA and Presidency officials also raised in passing continued security concerns over access to the Baghdad airport road. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C) Senior Advisor and Coordinator for Iraq Policy (S/I) Ambassador Richard Jones met with senior French MFA and Presidency officials April 25 to review his recent travel to Iraq and neighboring countries, U.S. priorities on Iraq in the coming year, and exchange views on the planned U.S.-EU conference on Iraq. MFA A/S-equivalent for North Africa/Middle East Jean-Francois Thibault hosted Ambassador Jones for a 90-minute discussion followed by a working lunch, which variously included MFA IO A/S-equivalent Jean-Maurice Ripert, MFA Cabinet Advisor for Middle East/UN issues Christophe Guilhou, GoF Interministerial Coordinator for Iraq Reconstruction Philippe Coste, MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq/Iran/Arabian Gulf Affairs Antoine Sivan, MFA DAS-equivalent for EU Common Security and Foreign Policy Pascal Le Deunff, and desk officers for Iraq and UN affairs. Jones later met separately with Presidential Technical Advisor on the Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche. Also attending S/I Jones' meetings on the U.S. side were Political M/C, EUR/ERA Deputy Director Jeffrey Rathke, and poloff (notetaker). The tone of S/I Jones' discussions was uniformly cordial and constructive, with French officials eager to solicit his views and general consensus emerging on issues of concern and the way forward for the coming year.

MFA DISCUSSIONS: POLITICAL PROCESS, KURDISH SEPARATISM

¶3. (C) Ambassador Jones opened his MFA discussions by reviewing his recent travel to Baghdad and the region and U.S. priorities for the coming year, namely maintain momentum from January elections and complete Iraq's political transition to an elected government under a permanent constitution by the end of 2005. In the meantime, the U.S. would continue efforts to strengthen rule of law in Iraq, which included aid to police and civil security authorities as well as the judiciary and correctional system; continue efforts to provide essential services; promote economic security via job creation and conclusion of a new IMF agreement by year-end; and develop grassroots democracy, particularly through support for Iraq's provincial governments. On the security front, U.S. forces would continue to fight the insurgency and work to transfer responsibilities to Iraqis, who now numbered some 150,000 in trained, equipped security forces, but were in need of more training to boost numbers and better function as units.

¶4. (C) Responding to Ambassador Jones' points on U.S. priorities, Thibault affirmed that the designation of the Presidency Council had been a positive sign, despite delays in formation of the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG), which the GoF hoped would be resolved in coming days. In the GoF view, each of the three presidency council members were moderates, inclined towards consensus. Talabani's accession

to the presidency was important to the GoF, in that it confirmed the Kurds' inscription into Iraqi political institutions. The GoF remained very worried about the potential threat of sectarianism, especially Kurdish separatism, to Iraqi unity; Thibault cited the Kirkuk dispute, Kurdish claims to oil revenues, and Kurdish efforts to have veto-authority over the entry of the Iraqi army into Kurdish territory as troubling examples. Thibault observed that Iraq's Shi'a community had shown commendable restraint in resisting attempts to sow sectarian strife, such as the killings of Iraqi Shi'a civilians at Mada'in. Thibault also raised familiar French concerns on the need to include Sunnis in Iraq's political process, especially drafting the constitution. In passing, Thibault noted concern that the Iraqi government's credibility was undermined by its remaining in the Green Zone. When pressed by Ambassador Jones on this point, Thibault conceded that the GoF was not making a recommendation, but merely observing that a negative image of the Iraqi government persisted in certain quarters of Iraq, due to its appearing "under the protection of foreign forces." MFA DAS-equivalent Sivan added that it was important that the new ITG not be seen as a continuation of the defunct Governing Council.

15. (C) Ambassador Jones observed that he saw near-total agreement between USG and GoF views, and confirmed U.S. regard for the Presidency Council and U.S. concerns about potential Kurdish overreach. Jones pointed out that Kurdish leaders had accepted the TAL principles that Kirkuk would not be settled until after the constitution, and that the process for settling the issue must be acceptable to the Iraqi people. The U.S. consistently maintained that oil revenues were the property of the national government, and, similarly, the U.S. did not support Kurdish efforts to block national army access to Kurdish territory. Jones stressed that the USG was pressing for a rapid breakthrough on ITG formation, but noted that there was an inherent tension between the need for inclusivity -- a shared U.S. and French priority -- and speed with which a compromise could be reached. To achieve better Sunni representation in the Transitional Government, either the United Iraqi Alliance (itself a coalition of some 20 parties), the Kurdish list (another coalition of parties) and/or Allawi's list would have to accept a ministerial apportionment lower than their share of the Transitional Assembly. Other reasons for the ITG delay were more procedural, such as the fact that negotiations for a new government could not begin until election results were certified, some 3 weeks after voting took place. Thibault appeared reassured by Jones' clarifications on Kurdish separatism and ITG formation, and asked whether Vice President-designate Ghazi al-Yawer had legitimacy, in the U.S. view. Jones responded that it was difficult to assess who represented the Sunni community because of their low turnout in the election.

MFA ON IRAQ ASSISTANCE, DONOR COORDINATION

16. (C) MFA IO A/S-equivalent Ripert briefed Ambassador Jones on French views on a new international donor mechanism for assistance to Iraq institutions, which the GoF had begun to explore with European counterparts. He stressed that the GoF has not seeking to build a complicated new mechanism, and wanted to keep the Iraqi government in the lead role, with the UN functioning as a sort of "clearinghouse." At the same time, Ripert cautioned that we should not put too much emphasis on the UN or give it an impossible mandate. That said, the UN appeared committed to taking a more active role and increasing its presence in Iraq, despite security concerns. The GoF also supported the idea of having specific countries or institutions (like the EU) take a lead role in specific sectors of institutional support, like the EU "JUSTLEX" program to offer rule of law training to Iraqi police and judges. Having such lead roles could improve donor coordination and burdensharing, and help channel assistance from countries which did not have a presence on the ground in Iraq. MFA DAS-equivalent for ESDP Le Deunff, providing further detail on the JUSTLEX program, confirmed that France had topped the list of training pledges, offering to train some 200 Iraqis (175 police and 30 judges) in France, out of a total 700 Iraqi trainees covered by the program. Le Deunff added that the estimated 10 million euro budget for the JUSTLEX program was for EU expenses only and did not include the costs for the bilateral training offers, such as that from France.

17. (C) Ambassador Jones noted that the U.S. agreed totally on the need for an Iraqi lead on international assistance. We similarly supported the UN playing a coordinating role, even though in many other countries this role was filled by the World Bank. We also agreed on the need for better coordination with Iraqis and among donors to avoid duplication and better meet Iraq's needs. Ambassador Jones stressed U.S. readiness to be helpful on donor coordination, such as sharing lessons learned; for instance, in U.S. experience, we had found that reconstruction projects in Iraq

were generally more costly than initially planned, not just due to security costs, but due to other factors, such as shortages in building supplies. Jones also noted that a lead nation framework in institutional assistance was acceptable, as long as this did not suggest a monopoly. The French readily concurred.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

18. (C) On the planned U.S.-EU conference on Iraq, Ambassador Jones emphasized that his discussions in Baghdad, regional capitals, and Brussels had been marked by consensus that the conference should be primarily political in nature, and give the international community the chance to show unity behind the democratically elected Iraqi government as it presents its program to the world. The conference agenda should focus on the three major areas of UNSCR 1546: the political, security, and economic fronts. The political aspect should focus on the need to preserve established deadlines, support the constitutional drafting process, and encourage all communities to take part in government. On security, the conference should focus on rule of law efforts, while on the economic front, it should concentrate on coordination to mobilize existing offers of assistance, vice new pledges. At the same time, any offers conference participants, especially non-Paris club members, could make on Iraqi debt forgiveness would be important, to help Iraq meet its IMF commitments by year-end. Jones stressed the U.S. view that the Paris Club Iraqi debt compromise was a floor, not ceiling, for debt reduction, and cited the U.S. decision to forgive 100 percent of Iraq's debt.

19. (C) Thibault concurred with U.S. views on the conference agenda, and agreed that the main purpose of the conference was clearly political, to assist the new Iraqi government and "put them at the center." On the economic front, Thibault said the GoF would advocate a new mechanism for coordinating assistance, as outlined by Ripert, with an Iraqi lead and important UN role. On security, Thibault endorsed the U.S.-proposed focus on rule of law, and cautioned that straying into military issues could lead discussion to more problematic issues, such as the duration of the MNF-1 presence in Iraq. (Note: In a later comment over lunch, Thibault remarked to Jones that "giving a perspective" on the ending of the MNF-1 mission could help undermine the insurgency, but he stressed that he was making the point in the "softest way" possible. End note.) Further on the conference agenda, Ripert asked what the U.S. thought of adding a fourth pillar to the conference agenda, to focus on human rights. (Note: The MFA Iraq desk later told us that the UK had floated the idea of a human rights agenda item during a UK-GoF brainstorming session on Iraq issues in London 4/22. End note.) Jones noted that human rights issues could be covered in the political or rule of law-related agenda items for the conference, as well as the conference communique, without adding fourth agenda item.

10. (C) Over lunch, Thibault and his colleagues sought details on U.S. views on the potential scope of invitees to the conference, stressing the GoF preference to keep the gathering pragmatic and effective, and avoid an unwieldy participant list. The GoF preference was for a "Sharm al-Sheikh-type" gathering, with the P-5, G-8, EU, UN, and Iraq's neighbors represented. S/I Jones described the U.S. as in between the Iraqi preference (expressed by FM Zebari) for as large gathering as possible and the EU preference for a smaller event. A large show of international support was important, but it was also clear that not all participants could speak at the one-day event. S/I Jones noted that the U.S. and EU had decided to exchange notional participation lists to reach agreement on the issue, and offered to share the finalized, U.S. draft list with the GoF; the current, draft U.S. list numbered about 80 potential invitees, of which 50 were EU and Coalition members -- "must do's" for the U.S. In response to questions from Thibault and others, Jones clarified that the U.S. did not envision inviting every Arab League member, that we wanted to see India and Pakistan on the list, and that no decision had been made on inviting the NATO Secretary-General, though it might make sense. On timing for the conference, Thibault commented that the proposed June 22 date could be problematic for FM Barnier as it corresponded with the weekly GoF Council of Ministers meeting, though other French participants, including Boche in the separate meeting with him, were not insistent on this point. Thibault and his MFA counterparts also stressed hope that ample time would be given prior to the conference to negotiating the communique, which could not be resolved in the one-day planned senior officials' meeting to precede the conference. Other questions posed by Thibault and his MFA colleagues over lunch focused on U.S. views on Syrian and Iranian interference in Iraq, as well as the relative roles of foreign versus Iraqi fighters in the insurgency.

PRESIDENCY RESPONSE

11. (C) In a separate meeting, Presidential Middle East

advisor Boche offered strong support for U.S. objectives on the conference, particularly the emphasis on the political dimension. Boche echoed Thibault's comment on the need for inclusivity in the constitutional process, but quipped that Sunni lack of representation in the Transitional Assembly was the fault of Sunnis for not participating in elections. Boche also concurred with the U.S. emphasis on maintaining the calendar for Iraq's political transition, noting that we had been wise to resist calls late last year to postpone Iraq's January elections. On security-related discussions at the conference, Boche said the U.S. emphasis on rule of law was "totally compatible" with French views. Boche reaffirmed that the GoF was reflecting on a new coordination mechanism for institutional development aid, with Iraq in the lead and the UN in a "clearing house" role. He repeated the concept, earlier raised by MFA officials, of having "lead nations" in certain sectors of institutional assistance, adding that the EU should take advantage of the conference to increase its visibility on assisting Iraq, which had not been possible up to now. Boche also repeated GoF concerns on the scope of invitees to the conference, noting that the GoF preferred a smaller grouping (P-5, G-8, neighbors) than the 60 or so invitees proposed by the UK.

¶12. (C) Boche also sought U.S. views on federalism in Iraq and the problem of Kurdish separatism, with Amb. Jones repeating points made earlier to MFA officials. Further on federalism, Jones stressed that media coverage of the January 30 elections had missed the story that 20 elections took place that day, including for provincial councils in all 18 of Iraq's governorates. Federalism was not a divisive factor so much as a way to bring the Iraqi government closer to the people and help keep Iraq together, by giving a sense of local ownership and control after one of the most brutal and centralized dictatorships in modern history. Boche also asked for U.S. views on Syrian and Iranian interference in Iraq, and in closing, raised continued GoF security concerns on access to the Baghdad airport road, emphasizing the sensitivity of the issue to the GoF (reftel).

COMMENT

¶13. (C) S/I Jones' visit served a very useful purpose in that it gave the French the all-important sense of being consulted on Iraq, when in fact they were by and large in listening mode and seeking U.S. views on the way forward and current state of play. The degree to which the French side expressed overwhelming agreement with U.S. objectives marks a sea-change from Iraq discussions of last year, when the French were focused on criticizing U.S. efforts for falling short or questioning the legitimacy of the Governing Council and IIG, without bringing anything to the table in terms of concrete assistance. Another shift in GoF thinking appears to have taken place, with concerns about Kurdish separatism taking precedence over the GoF's earlier emphasis on Sunni inclusivity, with the Kurdish issue viewed here as the more serious potential threat to Iraq's territorial integrity. End comment.

¶14. (U) Ambassador Jones cleared this message. Baghdad minimize considered.

ROSENBLATT